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ABSTRACT

This report describes the activities and performance of the Vermont Rural Autism Project (VT-RAP), a training program designed to prepare 16 interdisciplinary trainees as specialists to serve children with autism spectrum disorders (ASD) in rural settings each year for a total of 48 specialists trained over the 3 years of the project. Four of the 16 trainees prepared each year complete the training program as part of their master's degree in speech-language pathology (SLP). Four trainees are master's prepared SLPs who complete 18 credits of course work and practica as specialists in ASD. Four trainees are master's prepared early childhood special educators who complete 18 credits of coursework and practica as specialists in ASD. Lastly, four trainees are related service providers who complete at least nine graduate credits of course work and practica as specialists in ASD. To respond to the need for interdisciplinary, community-based teams to serve the needs of children with ASD, the 16 trainees are divided into four teams. Results from the project indicate progress continues to be made in achieving the objectives that have been formatted for the purpose of developing, implementing, assessing, and disseminating this training program for professionals serving children with ASD and their families. (CR)

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Preparing Speech-Language Pathologists and Early Childhood Providers To Serve the Needs of Children with Autism Spectrum Disorders in Rural Settings. Performance Report Year 3: 1999-2000.

Patricia A. Prelock

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PERFORMANCE REPORT YEAR 3: 1999-2000

Prepared by

Patricia A. Prelock, Ph.D., CCC-SLP, Project Director

PROJECT TITLE: *Preparing Speech-Language Pathologists and Early Childhood Providers to Serve the Needs of Children with Autism Spectrum Disorders in Rural Settings*

PR/Award #: H029A770054-01

II. Project Summary

The Vermont Rural Autism Project (VT-RAP) is a training program designed to prepare 16 interdisciplinary trainees as specialists to serve children with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) in rural settings each year for a total of 48 specialists trained over the three years of the project. Four of the 16 trainees prepared each year complete the training program as part of their master's degree in speech-language pathology. Four trainees are master's prepared SLPs who complete 18 credits of coursework and practica as specialists in ASD. Four trainees are master's prepared early childhood special educators (ECSEs) who complete 18 credits of coursework and practica as specialists in ASD. Lastly, four trainees are related service providers (e.g., social workers, child care and respite providers, psychologists, occupational and physical therapists, mental health workers, nurses) who complete at least nine graduate credits of coursework and practica as specialists in ASD. To respond to the need for interdisciplinary, community-based teams to serve the needs of children with ASD, the 16 trainees are divided into four teams. Each team includes four members: a second year master's degree student in SLP, a community-based SLP and ECSE who serve children with ASD and their families in the same preschool program, and a community-based related service provider.

VT-RAP is an 18 credit competency-based training program involving a two course sequence offered through distance learning technology, a Summer Regional Institute with the participation of regional and national experts in ASD, a three semester sequence of clinical study in ASD, and leadership activities in the areas of care coordination, consultation and technical assistance, inservice training and transition planning. The innovative framework for clinical study in ASD allows specialist level trainees to continue in their jobs supporting the children they serve while at the same time increasing their opportunities for specialist level training in ASD. The framework for training also supports the development of specialist level teams in ASD across the five major regions of the state of Vermont over the three years of the project.

III. Project Status

Progress continues to be made in achieving the objectives that have been formulated for the purpose of developing, implementing, assessing and disseminating this training program for SLPs, ECSEs and related service providers in rural settings serving children with ASD and their families. A summary of the activities completed for each objective and a description of the accomplishments and outcomes during the third year of the project are described below. Results of the Summer Institute for both Year 2 & Year 3 are included since the last performance report was written prior to the Summer Institute.

Objective 1. **To recruit 16 individuals who have met the eligibility criteria for acceptance into the specialist level training program in ASD each year of the project.**

Information about the program, including applications for participation as a trainee, was prepared and distributed to all first year graduate students in speech-language pathology in December of 1998. Approximately 5 graduate students applied for 4 trainee positions in speech-language pathology. The Project Director met with the Director of Graduate Studies, and the Chair of the Department of Communication Sciences to get input into these applications. All student applicants were interviewed in March of 1999, and final selections were made by April 15, 1999. Students were informed of the decisions and arrangements made to complete the clinical hours and courses they needed prior to participating in the project. Two in state and two out-of-state students were selected. These students began the third year of the project with the community-based trainees in September of 1999.

During the round of applications reviewed for in-place community-based professionals for Year 2, applications for Year 3 were also considered. In June of 1998, teams were selected for both Years 2 and 3 so those community professionals would have sufficient time to prepare for the expectations and time required of them to participate in the project. Two of the four teams tentatively selected for Year 3 were unable to make the required commitment, therefore, another round of applications for recruiting community-based trainees for Year 3 of the project were sent out in January and February of 1999. Approximately 10 applications were received for the 6 community positions available. The management team and representatives from the state agencies supporting the project will met in April of 1999 to review these applications and brainstorm additional potential training teams in the targeted regions of the state. In May of 1999, the in-place professionals for the training teams for Year 3 of the project were selected.

The following trainees were selected and completed year 3 of the training project:

Second Year Graduate Student Trainees in Speech-Language Pathology

1. Allie Martin (out-of-state student)
2. Karen Towle (out-of-state student)
3. Katie Willard (in-state student)
4. Ginette Perry (in-state student)

In-place Master's Prepared SLPs in Community Preschool Programs

5. Patti Taffel
6. Beth McCoy
7. Joan Campbell
8. Kathy Keizer

In-place Master's Prepared ECSEs in Community Preschool Programs

9. Cinda Young
10. Leo Blair
11. Mary Ann Lauder
12. Cindy Moran (SLP-school-age program)

Other Community-Based Service Providers

13. Kit Doreau (occupational therapist; completed only 1/2 year because of health)
14. Ruth Pratt (occupational therapy assistant)
15. Joy Wilcox (integration specialist)
16. Viki Barofio (individual assistant)

Trainees were informed of their selection and participated in an Orientation on September 1, 1999. VT-RAP was explained, training manuals were distributed and four training teams were formed. All students were registered for their coursework that began on September 8, 1999, and practica experiences began by September 30, 1999. Trainees completed their VT-RAP experience in August 2000. All community-based trainees are continuing service to children with a range of developmental disabilities in their home communities following completion of the training. All four graduate students have jobs in settings affording them the opportunity to continue their service delivery to young children with special needs in the home, preschool and community settings.

Objective 2. **To develop and implement coursework in ASD for 16 trainees each year of the project.**

Faculty members were trained in the use of distance learning technology during the months of August, September and October 1997, during the first year of the project. Distance learning sites were identified for both the Fall and Spring semesters for Year 3, and the two graduate courses developed for Years 1 & 2 of the project were refined based on student and faculty input, and updated to include the most recent research and practices in autism. The course titles, number of students enrolled, number of individuals who attended the course without enrolling just to obtain the information, and the distance learning sites to which the coursework was offered during Year 3 of the project are presented below:

Semester	Course	Students Enrolled	Students Sitting in	Distance Learning Sites
Fall 1999	CMSI 293 Seminar in Autism I: Understanding ASD & Creating Diagnostic Profiles *(3 graduate credits)*	**32**	**9**	**Burlington Montpelier Randolph Center Newport Springfield Middlebury Canaan**
Spring 2000	CMSI 294 Seminar in Autism II: Understanding & Implementing Effective Interventions *(3 graduate credits)*	**27**	**11**	**Burlington Montpelier Randolph Center Newport Springfield Middlebury Canaan**

Enrolled students included the project trainees as well as other educators, speech-language pathologists, childcare service providers, and mental health consultants. Students who sat in on the course included educators, instructional assistants, speech-language pathologists, parents, grandparents, psychologists, occupational therapists, physical therapists, teachers, and physicians.

Based on the feedback provided through course evaluations (December 1998 and May 1999) and trainee retreats (May and August of 1999), enhancements were made to the courses, readings were updated, and revised student guides/coursepacks were prepared for Year 3 in August of 1999. New distance learning sites were identified to accommodate the training teams selected across the state during the third year of the project as seen in the chart above.

A Regional Summer Institute was developed for Years 2 & 3 of the project as a one-week intensive three credit graduate course featuring regional, national and international speakers. Over 4000 brochures were prepared and disseminated throughout the state and New England Region (March 1999 for Year 2 & March of 2000 for Year 3). Information about the institute was also shared on the web that goes out to all University Affiliated Programs across the country. The Institute for Year 2 was held on June 21-25, 1999 and for Year 3 on June 26-30, 2000. The institutes were designed to allow for some flexibility in the number of days and the amount of time in the day individuals participate. Teams were encouraged to attend. Scholarships were provided for parents to attend through Parent to Parent of Vermont, the State Department of Education, and the Family, Infant and Toddler Project of Vermont. Each day was divided into speaker presentations from 8:30 am to 3:00 PM, followed by facilitated discussions from 3:30-5:30 for those individuals enrolled as graduate students. The following is a summary of the speakers the 1999 & 2000 Summer Institute:

Year 2: 1999 Summer Institute in Autism

Course:	CMSI 295	Addressing the Assessment and Intervention Needs of Children with ASD and their Families *(3 graduate credits)*
	Monday:	Carol Gray *Social Stories & Comic Strip Conversations: Unique Methods to Teach Social Understanding*
	Tuesday:	Diane Twachtman-Cullen *In Search of Best Practices in ASD Intervention*
	Wednesday:	Ed Sbardellati, Tara Gill, Helena O'Riordan, Nicole Vandenberg *Teaming to Provide Wrap Around Services for Children with ASD*
		Lisa Lawlor, Lori Poludin, Lisa Soule, Bill White, Robert Villaincourt & Dawn Seibert *Joey & Ed: Transition to the Early Elementary Years*
	Thursday:	G. Gordon Williamson *Promoting Sensory Integration and Self-regulation in Young Children with ASD*
	Friday:	Alex Michaels *Demystifying the Autism Spectrum Disorders*

Year 3: *2000 Summer Institute in Autism*

Course:	CMSI 295	Addressing the Assessment and Intervention Needs of Children with ASD and their Families *(3 graduate credits)*
	Monday:	Barry Prizant *Enhancing Communicative and Socioemotional Competence for Young Children with Autism Spectrum Disorders*
	Tuesday:	Catherine Lord

Diagnosis, Assessment, & Identification of Autism Spectrum Disorders

Sean Barron
The Life in a Day of Autism

Wednesday: Fern Sussman
A Presentation on More than Words: The Hanen Program for Parents of Children with Autism Spectrum Disorders

Thursday: Patricia A. Prelock & Vermont Teams
A Look at the Successes & Challenges of Vermont Teams Working for Children with Autism Spectrum Disorders

Friday: Joe Reichle
Designing Positive Behavioral Support Strategies: The Role of Functional Communication

1999 & 2000 Summer Institute Number of Attendees

	Year 2 1999	*Year 3 2000*
Number of attendees enrolled in the course (8:30-5:30):	**55**	**55**
Number of attendees for the entire week (8:30-3:00) not including students enrolled in the course	**119**	**102**
Number of day attendees	**177**	**153**
TOTAL ATTENDEES	**351**	**310**

The Autism Society of Vermont and the Vermont Autism Task Force had opportunities to meet with families and practitioners about services and supports throughout the state for children with ASD and their families. Occupational therapists set up a sensory room for families, children, and practitioners to utilize and experience throughout the institute. A coursepack of readings and handouts was prepared, and facilitators were selected to support the 3:30-5:30 discussions planned for individuals enrolled in the institute for course credit.

All trainees from Year 1 of the project were invited back to both the 1999 & 2000 Institute to continue their learning and professional development in the area of autism. They had an opportunity to network and collaborate with Year 2 & 3 trainees. Those trainees selected for Year 2 were also invited to participate in the 2000 Summer Institute to facilitate their professional development and ability to network with their peers.

Plans already have begun for developing a Regional Summer Institute as part of institutionalizing the VT-RAP in collaboration with state agencies.

Objective 3. **To develop and implement clinical study in ASD for 16 trainees each year of the project.**

Respite. With the support of the consulting Parent to Parent faculty mentor, trainees either selected families they knew or were assigned to families who had a child with ASD in September or October, 1999, to provide respite. **Twelve** trainees provided **30 hours** of respite to families with children along the spectrum. **Three** trainees provided **15 hours** of respite. The respite took many

forms and was negotiated with the family and the child involved. Trainees kept logs of their contacts and submitted a personal reflection of their respite experience as part of their growth portfolio. This practicum experience provided the trainees with a unique opportunity to be with a family, and share some of the day to day challenges and successes frequently experienced by families who have a child with ASD. Trainees also were able to expand their notion of family-centered care and build trusting relationships among the families they encountered.

Interdisciplinary, community-based assessments. Each of the fours teams were exposed to two models for assessment: 1) one involving mainly speech-language pathology, early childhood special education and community resource parents (E. M. Luse Center at the University of Vermont); and, 2) the second involving 12 different disciplines including occupational therapy, physical therapy, speech-language pathology, audiology, education, nursing, developmental pediatrics, nutrition, psychology, social work, public administration, and family support (Vermont Interdisciplinary Leadership Education for Health Professionals Program). Each training team was involved in 3 assessments for a total of **12 assessments** of children suspected of having ASD or significant impairments in language, social interaction, play and behavior. Training was supervised directly by an interdisciplinary team of project faculty.

Community-based intervention. The University -Community Liaison verified practicum sites and prepared agreements for supervision in December, 1999, for the four graduate student trainees who were placed in the community-based preschool programs of their community team members in January through June. Graduate students were placed in these settings **two days a week** to support the intervention needs of young children with ASD. Each training team was observed approximately two times by the Early Childhood Special Education Project Faculty and the University-Community Liaison during the Spring Semester (January through June 2000).

Summer intervention programs. Training teams met in April, May and early June to develop intensive summer programs to serve the needs of children with ASD in their community with consultation from the Project Director and other project faculty. Each training team designed a program that met the specific needs of the children in their setting. Trainees were required to put in approximately **120 hours of service**. This included direct contact with the children in the preschool they developed, home visits, community activities with the children with ASD and typical peers, pre-planning and weekly planning of the curriculum content and props, daily processing and data collection, and daily informational notes on progress for the parents of each child. Goals were developed for each of the programs by the training teams. Each training team was visited by project faculty to provide support and feedback approximately twice during the summer programs. The structure and success of the summer programs will be shared with the State Department of Education to continue a dialogue around the initiation of similar summer programs across the state for children with ASD.

Eight community-based trainees were registered each semester and in the summer to receive credit for their advanced clinical work with children with ASD. They have or will complete the following:

FALL 1999	CMSI 291 Clinical Study in ASD
SPRING 2000	CMSI 292 Clinical Study in ASD
SUMMER 2000	CMSI 291 Clinical Study in ASD

Objective 4. **To develop and implement leadership activities for systems change in ASD for 16 trainees each year of the project.**

Care coordination. Each of the four training teams identified one family with a child with ASD who required additional support to ensure the coordination of care across service agencies following the interdisciplinary assessment that was completed through VT-ILEHP. Four families

and children with ASD benefited directly from this care coordination experience which included helping families to receive funding for services, nutritional supplements, behavioral consultation, housing support, medical follow-up, etc.

Consultation & technical assistance. All four training teams were assigned to a regional educational consultant through the State of Vermont Interdisciplinary Team and participated in a planning meeting, observation and follow-up meeting around an older child with ASD being served in an inclusionary setting. Trainees were exposed to a variety of consultation approaches and offer their expertise in autism to support these community teams.

Transition planning. Each training team identified at least one child with ASD who would be transitioning from preschool to kindergarten. The training teams collaborated with the receiving school teams and family to develop a transition plan utilizing the TEEM approach. This approach provides a framework for teams to use with a sequence of critical activities to ensure an informed and smooth transition. Teams included in this process a way to train existing teams around the unique issues they may be facing while serving children with ASD and their families. The training teams developed and submitted a copy of their transition plan as part of their required coursework in CMSI 294. Other students taking this course, not members of the training teams, also submitted transition plans for children in their school communities, following a similar process. Therefore, several children, families and school programs benefited from the design and implementation of transition plans during the Spring Semester (2000). Training teams also made plans to follow-up on the transition plans during the Fall of 2000.

Inservice training. Each of the four training teams developed during the Summer Regional Institute an inservice training plan to be presented to personnel in their local health department, child care services agency and the Family, Infant and Toddler Project host agency. These inservices were reviewed by the Project Director and were presented in the community. Other students who took the Summer Regional Institute for course credit were also required to develop inservice training plans for their home district or community agency. Therefore, several inservices have occurred or will be occurring across the state during the months of August, September and October where individuals trained through VT-RAP disseminate information and share their knowledge. The regions and agencies of the state to benefit from this inservice training during the third year of the project are as follows:

Family, Infant & Toddler Host Agencies	VT Dept. of Health Div. of Community Health	Community Child Care Support Grant Agencies
Windham Region	Brattleboro Local Office	Windham/Brattleboro
Orleans/Essex Region	Newport Local Office	Orleans/N. Essex/Newport
Addison Region	Middlebury Local Office	Addison/Middlebury
Windsor South Region	Springfield Local Office	S. Windsor/Springfield

Objective 5. **To establish an advisory council to monitor the project goals and to assure quality in the academic and clinical training.**

An Advisory Council was formed during the first three months of the project (September, 1997-December, 1997) and two meetings were held during the first year of the project (March 4 and June 10, 1998). The committee was comprised of the following individuals: Preschool Coordinator for the Vermont State Department of Education; Director of the Family, Infant and Toddler Project of Vermont; Director of the Child Care Services Division of Social & Rehabilitative Services; Director of the Vermont Interdisciplinary Team; an early childhood special education teacher, speech-language pathologist and graduate trainee in speech pathology who were trainees in the first year of the project; three parents of children with Autism Spectrum Disorders; a

representative from Parent to Parent of Vermont; a representative from the Vermont Division of Developmental Disabilities; Director of Children with Special Health Needs; a developmental pediatrician; an occupational therapist; two experts outside of the state of Vermont (i.e., Dr. Jennifer Brown & Donna Murray); Director of the University Affiliated Program of Vermont; Chair of the Department of Communication Sciences; and Chair or representative of the Department of Pediatrics.

The Advisory Committee has met twice during Year 2 on December 1, 1998, and on April 7, 1999. The Advisory Committee also met twice during Year 3, on December 8, 1999 and March 8, 2000. Membership was expanded to include an individual with autism as well as a school administrator who participated in the project during Year 1, and two trainees from Year 2 and Year 3 while participating on the project.

Objective 6. **To evaluate and refine the coursework and clinical practica over the project's duration to identify strengths, determine areas of needed change and develop a refinement plan and instructional and methodological alternatives.**

The management team met with the Advisory Council in December of 1999 to review project goals and objectives as well as to examine evaluation data to insure that desired outcomes were being met. Evaluation data from the Fall 1999 coursework and distance learning technology, were reviewed. The University of Vermont has an in-place evaluation system for courses on campus as well as those provided through distance learning. These evaluation forms were completed by all participants in the Fall course. The Project Director and course instructor have also developed midsemester evaluations to assess progress in meeting student needs midway through the coursework so that needed modifications could be made. For the trainees, this midsemester review also includes an assessment of the project activities thus far in meeting the trainees' competencies. This midsemester evaluation is completed during both the Fall and Spring semesters.

VT-RAP project staff members developed course evaluations and pre-and post-assessments of learning for the 1999 & 2000 Summer Institutes. This data has been tallied and evaluated for perceived change in knowledge following participation in the institutes.

Two retreats were held (one in May & one in August, 1999) in Year 2 and one retreat (May 2000) was held in Year 3 to assess other aspects of the training program, including effectiveness of the practicum experiences, leadership activities, content offered through the course sequence, and supervision. These retreats included project faculty and trainees, and were used to evaluate the program plan, identify program strengths across all components of the curriculum, assess challenges, and determine action plans for areas of needed change. This information was used to make adjustments in the course content and practica for trainees participating in the institutionalization of the project which is just beginning.

All trainees were explained the process for evaluation and developing their individual professional growth portfolios in Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) during their orientation training on September 1, 1999. Trainees met with the Project Director and VT-RAP faculty supervising their practicum experiences in the Fall (December) and met again in the Spring (May) to evaluate their progress related to achieving their performance competencies and increasing their level of professional practice on a Professional Abilities Assessment tool. For areas of challenge or needed change, action or refinement plans were developed in collaboration with the trainees. Trainees also participated in a close out meeting or exit interview with the Project Director in July/August. For each evaluation meeting held, trainees provided the Project Director with written reflections of their self assessment of their progress toward meeting their training competencies. The Project Director carefully reviews all materials included in the trainees' growth portfolios and

provides both written and face-to-face feedback across progress towards all competency areas being trained.

Professional Performance Surveys were developed in the Fall of 1998 and will be distributed to Year 1 & 2 trainees and their employers in December of 2000. This will be done to assess the long-term impact of the training on those trainees who participated in the first and second years of the project.

Objective 7. **To disseminate information about the project and create a model for a specialist level training program for serving young children with ASD and their families that can be replicated in other rural settings.**

A model curriculum for implementing a specialist level training program has been designed and implemented during the three years of the project. This curriculum has been shared with the Vermont State Department of Education in the form of course syllabi, student guides and coursepacks, and samples of transition plans, inservices, assessment protocols, and intervention summaries related to children with Autism Spectrum Disorders and their families. Summaries of practicum experiences, particularly the summer practicum, designed to provide intensive training and service delivery, have also been shared with the State Department of Education. The Project Director has shared this information with the Advisory Council and has begun brainstorming ways this type of summer program experience could be institutionalized across the state for communities serving children with ASD, and ways the additional training of providers might occur. This curriculum continues to be refined as we are working to institutionalize the project this year (2000-2001). Funds have been secured from three state agencies to continue the project with a reduced number of trainees (from 16 to 2) but with the continuation of the coursework and institute as well as 4 interdisciplinary assessments and 4 AAC assessments for individuals with autism.

A paper describing the interdisciplinary training model for VT-RAP was presented to the 1998 American Speech-Language-Hearing Convention in San Antonio, Thursday, Nov. 19, 1998. Four of the graduate student trainees in speech-language pathology who participated in the first year of the project presented this miniseminar along with the Project Director and the University Community Liaison. The miniseminar was entitled: "Interdisciplinary Assessment: Serving Children with Neurodevelopmental Disabilities & their Families." The Project Director has also been involved in disseminating information locally and across the state related to improving services to children with ASD and their families, particularly to the Vermont Association for Special Education Administrators and the Chittenden County Special Education Administrators. Dr. Prelock also worked with the Autism Society of Vermont to present a lecture series on issues facing adolescents with autism and she presented two of the six sessions, one emphasizing the language & curriculum needs of older children and adolescents with ASD and the second emphasizing social language use in the form of social scripts and social stories. These sessions occurred in February and March of 2000.

The model for interdisciplinary assessment and making decisions for intervention that has developed through the project is also being disseminated regionally and nationally. A VT-RAP team, including parents, project faculty and trainees, presented the assessment model at the Northeast Regional Conference on Autism in Cromwell, CT, in October, 1998. The Project Director has also presented this information at the Missouri State Speech-Language-Hearing Convention (March 12 & 13, 1999), through a national teleconference sponsored by ASHA in April of 1999, and the assessment model was presented in California at their State Speech-Language-Hearing Convention in April, 1999 as well as at the Autism Society of Los Angeles in March, 2000. Recently, the Project Director presented full day training at the ASHA Schools Conference in Las Vegas related to treatment issues for children with ASD (July 2000).

A brochure explaining the VT-RAP project, including training and service opportunities has been disseminated to students, families and the professional community statewide. The Project also has been described and activities updated through the Family Infant and Toddler Project Newsletter (state publication), the PDD Review (parent's newsletter), and the UVM Division of Continuing Education magazine (university publication) during the Year 2 of the project. The Project was also featured in two national publications, *The Advocate* and *Advance for Speech-Language Pathologists* during Year 3 of the project. A webpage has been developed and the course syllabus with references and the VT-RAP library holdings are listed on line.

Videotapes of all classes in the Fall and Spring courses as well as the Summer Regional Institute have been made. Community providers, families, faculty, and students are permitted to borrow these videotapes for viewing and sharing with community teams. A materials lending library has been developed with all books, journals and videotapes being logged and categorized on computer. Copies have been made of these videotapes for inclusion in Parent to Parent of Vermont's library, which is a statewide resource for families and providers interested in children with special health care needs.

The Project Director is also a member of the state Autism Task Force and the MAP to Inclusive ChildCare Project. The Project Director has numerous opportunities to provide information about the VT-RAP Project related to improving the training of all providers, and particularly to child care providers (MAP to Inclusive Child Care Project), and to participate in developing initiatives around practice across the state. She was involved in implementing a position statement that has been presented to the State of Vermont Director of Special Education and Director of the Agency of Human Services.

A research team has been formed and survey research related to the diagnostic approaches used to make a determination of autism in the states of Vermont and New Hampshire has been completed by a graduate student through the project and is being prepared for publication. Another graduate student trainee has completed research on the communication skills of girls with Rett Syndrome and social-communication that occurs among individuals with ASD and familiar vs. unfamiliar adult partners. Additional research activities have been initiated related to nutritional considerations for children with autism as well as the effects of the assessment model on families' who have participated in the project.

Status of the Evaluation Plan

Input Evaluation. Focus group discussions with families at the Summer Regional Institute and Midyear course and program evaluations with project trainees have been used to gather information from stakeholders regarding the effectiveness of the project curriculum and program implementation. Family interviews were conducted with those families who participated in the interdisciplinary assessments to obtain their input regarding the effectiveness of the interdisciplinary assessment process. Families are offered the opportunity to plan directly with the training teams the focus of the community-based assessments as well as follow-up planning to address the questions being asked. Retreats in the Spring (May, 1999 & 2000) and Summer (August, 1999) were also used to gather input regarding strengths and challenges of the training experience and trainee considerations for making enhancements in the program during the final year of the project.

A review of the trainee selection criteria indicated that trainee recruitment and selection for the third year of the project followed the criteria specified.

Process Evaluation. The management team meets every 4-8 weeks to review project activities and ensure efficient and effective action planning. Project faculty is available to trainees

each week to address training needs and questions. Project faculty fully participates in the community-based interdisciplinary assessments.

The University Course Evaluation system is used to assess student learning, instructor performance and content relevance. Results for the Fall Semester course is as follows:

Fall 1999 CMSI 293 Seminar in Autism I: Understanding ASD & Creating Diagnostic Profiles

Variable	Mean (out of 5.00)
Overall	4.54
Content	4.47
Methods	4.39
Supplemental Materials	4.42
Instructor	4.87

The Project Director uses this information to make changes in the course development for the third year of the project.

In addition to the general course evaluation form, a modified university course evaluation form was used to assess the effectiveness of using the distance learning network as a medium for quality education in the rural setting; quality of the instructor, course content and materials; effectiveness of the instructor's evaluation procedures; degree to which course objectives were met and supported the identified competencies in the individual content areas; and, the effectiveness of the Family Resource Consultants. These course evaluations indicated that the use of e-mail was an effective way to communicate with students at the distance learning sites and that the technology allowed individuals to take the coursework in their home community. Evaluation of course content and the instructor indicated satisfaction. Suggestions were made about improving the audio quality to the sites and the ease with which materials are distributed to the end sites. The Project Director continues to work with the Distance Learning staff to develop action plans for all concerns identified by student participants.

Output Evaluation

1) Number of Trained Personnel. **15 trainees completed the training program during Year 3 of the project. Over the course of the 3-year project, 50 trainees completed the project, which are 2 more than was projected.**

2) Trainee Competencies. At the end of the fall semester, trainees achieved a rating of at least 2 (improved knowledge and skills) and sometimes 3 on the individual items comprising each of the five competency areas. At the end of the spring semester, trainees achieved a rating of at least 3 (satisfactory knowledge and skills) and for many items trainees achieved a 4 (competent performance).

Competency levels achieved at the end of the summer for Year 2 & Year 3 trainees indicated satisfactory to competent knowledge and skills in the five competency areas, with strong gains being made in treatment and leadership for systems change.

3) Growth Portfolios. Trainees developed a 'professional growth portfolio' which demonstrates the success they have had in achieving the competencies for the training program in autism. It is based on their initial Assessment of Professional Competencies in ASD. Using their self assessment over the course of the program, trainees reflect on their own progress in achieving knowledge and skills for each of the required competencies, and gather additional feedback and

reflections from program faculty, community professionals, families and children with whom they are involved over the course of the project. Trainees often include samples of projects completed as part of their course requirements and other activities they have completed as part of their interdisciplinary training team. Trainees meet with the Project Director and project faculty to review their growth and assess their professional abilities at the end of the Fall and Spring Semesters. Exit interviews with final reflections and self-assessments will occurred in (July/August, 1999 & 2000) with the trainees and the Project Director.

4) Perceptions of School-Based Site Supervisors, University-Community Liaison, Early Childhood Coordinator and Families. Instruments have been constructed to assess the effectiveness of the trainees as perceived by the school-based site supervisors, the University-Community Liaison, the Early Childhood Coordinator and the families whose children are served by the trainees in the program. These were disseminated for input in May of 1999 & 2000.

5) Changes in attitudes and therapeutic practices at UVM and training sites. The Project Director will be working with the Management Team and the Advisory Council to construct a survey which adequately appraises faculty and site personnel responsiveness in serving children with ASD and their families as a result of exposure to and/or participation in the training program. This will occur as part of the institutionalization of the project.

6) Gains of young children with ASD served. Trainees, community teams and project staff are just beginning to develop ways to critically assess the gains of children impacted by project trainees. Videotapes are being analyzed throughout the year by training teams to assess change and progress in language, socialization and peer interaction. Significant data has been collected for each child with ASD during the summer programs (July, 1999 & 2000) and this data is being examined. Some calls have been received from families who participated in the project during Years 1 & 2 and report on the successes of programming that were facilitated through the involvement of the VT-RAP training teams. Specific results obtained thus far from families who have returned their feedback forms have indicated overall satisfaction (4.67 out of 5.00) with the services provided through VT-RAP. Services families appreciated most included the community-based nature of the assessment so that the children were seen in their natural environments; the ongoing support provided by the graduate students in speech-language pathology; and, the informational material provided. Individual interviews have also been conducted with families as part of a qualitative doctoral research project, which has demonstrated a shift in attitudes towards service delivery for children with ASD and their families since participating in VT-RAP. An article describing these results has been submitted for publication.

7) Follow-up Assessment. A follow-up assessment was sent to all trainees who completed the program during Year 1 of the project. Trainees were also asked to give a survey to their employers. This assessment instrument was disseminated in December of 1998 and preliminary results indicate that trainees are working, serving children in early education and feel the training they received helped to prepare them to function effectively as a professional. Employer surveys are also being returned which indicate satisfaction in the professional preparation of the trainees. This survey will be sent again in late Fall 2000 to trainees across the 3 years of the project to assess their competencies & perceived effectiveness by their employers in meeting the needs of children and families affected by ASD.

IV. Budget Information

A copy of the requested carryover budget is attached. The proposed expenditures are itemized. Carryover of this budget will help to ensure a successful institutionalization of the project.

V. Supplemental Information/Changes No specific changes will be made in the project

strategies for Year 3 other than modifications and refinements in the curricular content and practica experiences based on feedback from trainees, families, project staff and the community.

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